

LAURIE KRUK

## Heart Exercise

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Mothers-in-process, we meet at intersections  
of public and private. In the hallway  
to the birthing unit, bent double, waiting  
for the tidal wave  
that will throw the newest Crusoe  
ashore, we grimace in recognition  
of nurse-led neighbour: *Yes, you too....*  
Three years later, lined up  
for the After Hours Clinic, no supper, holding  
crying toddlers to the breasts which no longer answer,  
while childless ones behind check watches, shift loudly, we lock eyes: *Yes.*  
Or in the spring parking lot, six years on  
where we must talk a daughter out of a dirty shirt before Grandma's:  
pre-breasts wiggling, voice shrilling nine-year-old shame,  
we avoid looking too closely as we pass  
by, but smile our knowing.

Though years roll on,  
you know that there is no end  
to this working of the core;  
even as we complete  
one mothering task, hurry them along  
to the next station  
a late-learning muscle

is growing inside of me, taking  
up more space, so that I ache  
to expand—

Exasperated, one spring day, you send both,  
girls seven and ten, for a walk to the corner,  
and blessedly, they go.  
Ten minutes, twenty, forty—you start to look  
out the window, out  
the door. Down the street. You  
get in the car, heart hammering: *Yes, you too*  
start down the driveway, around  
the corner  
and their absence widens, takes shape as shadows  
thicken obscenely at road edges. You want  
to shout  
to bovinely oblivious neighbours  
watering lawns, sitting on their porches,  
disturb the peace—*You, too*—

but just before you draw  
the first bitter lungful up,  
to wound the air with their names,  
they come running down the road

ditch flowers  
in their hands.